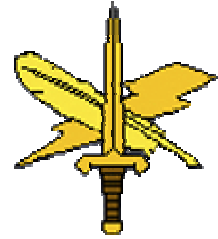




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FORT RILEY, COMMUNITIES WITNESS DIVISION CHANGES, WELCOME NEW COMMANDER

By Anna Morelock
Staff writer

Maj. Gen. Carter Ham first came to Fort Riley in 1975 as an ROTC cadet. He didn't see much of main post then and said he didn't recall ever being invited to the general's house. Now, just over 30 years later, that house is his.

Ham took command of Fort Riley and of the oldest division in the Army, the "Big Red One," in a ceremony Aug. 1 on Cavalry Parade Field.

The ceremony marked the return of the 1st Infantry Division (Mech) to Fort Riley from Germany after a 10-year absence. Ham accepted the division's colors from Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, commanding general of III Corps, the 1st Inf. Div.'s higher headquarters. Maj. Gen. Kenneth Hunzeker, who brought the division back from Germany, relinquished command of the renowned fighting division.

The transfer of authority from the 24th Infantry Division (Mech) to the 1st Inf. Div. included inactivation of the "Victory Division" and disappearance of the Taro Leaf patch its Soldiers wore on their left shoulder while serving with the 24th Inf. Div. (Mech) at Fort Riley.

Ceremony marks

'historic day'

"It's really a historic day," said Bill McKale, historian and Fort Riley museum director, "not only for the division but for Fort Riley, the Army, for Kansas and for the nation."

The ceremony started with a bang as the 4th Battalion, 1st Field Artillery, ceremonial half section fired a replica of an 1853 cannon after a welcome for the many dignitaries, Soldiers and community members attending the historic event.

The 1st Inf. Div. band walked the field, playing for its first time in a ceremony since arriving on post, and the official party was welcomed by a 15-gun salute provided by light towed howitzer crews of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, one of the newest subordinate units of the “Big Red One.”

First Sgt. Jason Scott of the Commanding General’s Mounted Color Guard rode Traveler to the front of the VIP section to deliver roses to the wives of the outgoing commanding generals, Maj. Gen. Dennis Hardy, 24th Inf. Div. (Mech), and Hunzeker. Ceremonial artillery round canisters were then presented to Hardy, Hunzeker and Ham.

The half-track provided by 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, carried the official party – Hardy, Ham, Hunzeker and Odierno – as they inspected the formed Soldiers representing 1st Inf. Div. (Mech) and other units stationed at Fort Riley.

After the unit color bearers massed in front of the reviewing stand and the national anthem played, the 24th Inf. Div. (Mech) flag was cased and the “Big Red One” flag was unfurled to signal the return of the “Big Red One” to Fort Riley.

“It’s a wonderful day, a great moment of celebration,” said U.S. Rep. Jim Ryun (R-Kan.) after the ceremony. The ceremony and return of the “Big Red One” to Kansas, “represents a lot of work by an awful lot of people,” he said. It represents a happy ending with the “Big Red One” returning, he added.

Outgoing commander thanks Soldiers

Hardy bade farewell by thanking the Soldiers standing before him on the field and the ones they represented who weren’t in attendance. He recalled his fond memories of Fort Riley, including his pride in the Soldiers he’s seen go to war and the ones he’s welcomed home.

“Diane and I will be forever proud, very proud of all that you’ve accomplished,” he told the troops.

Hunzeker reintroduced the “Big Red One” to Kansas with a loud “hooah,” bringing applause and cheers from the crowd.

“Today we celebrate a significant milestone in the history of our great division,” he said. “I’ve been known to say the sun always shines on the ‘Big Red One,’ and thank goodness the weather here in Kansas allows me to continue that tradition.”

The day may have been bittersweet for the outgoing commanders, Ham joked, but it was anything but bittersweet for him. “I can’t tell you what it means to look across that field and see the ‘Big Red One’ home,” he said.

During a press conference after the ceremony, Ham said it was a little bit intimidating to be the commanding general of the 1st Inf. Div. (Mech).

"I recognize the special legacy and heritage of this division," he said. "There are heroes from the very start in 1917, the first battles in 1918, throughout World War I, World War II, in Vietnam and most recently two times in Iraq. So, I understand that there is a tremendous legacy and heritage in this very special division. The men and women that have come before us have set a very, very high standard."

Ham said that it was a dream come true for him to be able to come to Fort Riley and rejoin the 1st Inf. Div (Mech).

"As we learned a little bit about this new assignment, one of the things that came through loud and clear from all the posts that I talked to is that there is a very special relationship between the Soldiers and families of Fort Riley and the local communities," he said.

Soldiers often return to Fort Riley and say that their best days in the Army were spent here, McKale said. Over the next five to 10 years, McKale predicted Fort Riley will see many leaders come through the ranks of the "Big Red One" who will go on to make names for themselves and for the Army at a national level.

"You look at the 1st Inf. Div. and you look at the leaders that have come through its ranks, enlisted and officer, who have gone on to important leadership positions Army-wide, and I think that we're really on the cusp of a very historic point."

Those future leaders "will have got their seasoning, so to speak, here at Fort Riley; so they're always going to have a little bit of Kansas that they're going to take away with them," he said. "Most of the guys who serve here have a very warm spot for this post because of its history and traditions."

Ham said Fort Riley's relationship with its surrounding communities was unlike anything he'd seen in his 30 years of service.

"This closeness between the community and the military community is truly something very, very special, and I look forward to being a part of that," he said. "We will be good neighbors and good stewards."

Ham also spoke about the "Big Red One's" upcoming mission now that it has moved back to Fort Riley.

The most important thing for the division now is to form, train and prepare Military Transition Teams to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan, he said.

"That is absolutely an essential part of our strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan to help those nations' security forces, both military and civilian police, become better each and every day," he said. "We've got to get the training right and the support right here so they're able to accomplish that mission."

"It was awe inspiring to see that wonderful formation, all those great Soldiers, their commanders, first sergeants, the command sergeants major," Ham said of the ceremony.

“It was a wonderful ceremony and a tremendous welcome for us to come here to Fort Riley and a most appropriate way to say thanks and farewell to Maj. Gen. and Mrs. Hardy, who have been such integral parts of this community for the past three years.” he added.